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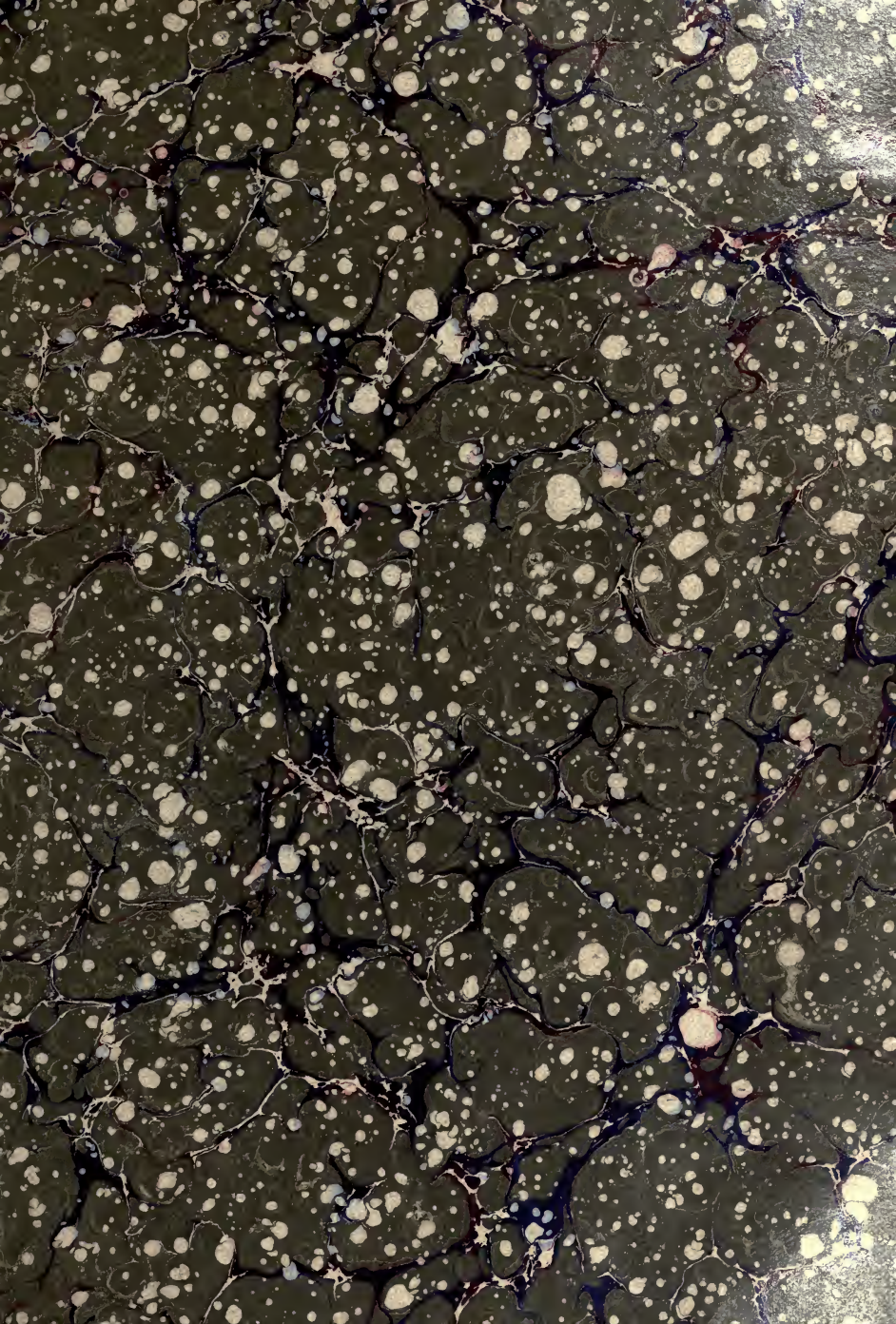
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# SKETCHES

OF

MR. & MRS. STEPHEN RIDGLEY,

BY

S. WATERHOUSE,

OF

WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY.



ST. LOUIS, MO.,

1892.



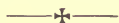
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## STEPHEN RIDGLEY.



BORN JULY 26TH, 1806;

DIED MAY 26TH, 1892.



STEPHEN RIDGLEY was the son of Thomas Ridgley. His father was born in 1777, in Motcombe, county of Wiltshire, England. He was the oldest son and a freeholder. He owned an interest for three lives in an estate in Horningsham, Wiltshire. He also cultivated rented lands. He was, therefore, a farmer both in the American and in the English sense. Dissenting from the established faith, he left the Church of England and joined the Methodists. For their use he built a church on his own land, and a few years ago, when the son visited the old homestead, the building was still standing. Thomas Ridgley was an earnest and devout Christian.

Dissatisfied with the restraints which obstruct the career of a poor man in England, he resolved to seek the freer conditions of American life. Accordingly, in 1816, he forsook his native land and came to Boston. During the twenty one years of his life in Boston and its vicinity, he followed the vocations of baker, gardener, and farmer. He spent thirteen years on a farm in Medford.

Unsuccessful in his efforts to accumulate property in New England, he determined to go West. In 1837, he set



out in a private conveyance and after three months of constant travel reached Alton, Illinois. From Alton he moved to Berwick, Illinois, and subsequently, after the death of his wife, went to live with some of his children at Bunker Hill, Illinois. He died in St. Louis at the age of eighty three, while on a visit to his son Richard. Thomas Ridgley was a man of very limited abilities. His inefficiency prevented success.

The maiden name of Stephen Ridgley's mother was Lydia Cross. She was born in 1776, in Maiden Bradley, Wiltshire, England. She had only a common school education, but was a woman of strong native sense. She was for many years a church member and in later life became fervently active in the service of religion. She died in Berwick, Warren county, Illinois, in the seventy fourth year of her age.

The issue of this marriage was eleven children, of whom but one survives.

Stephen, the seventh child, was born in Horningsham, England, July 26th 1806. His birthplace was a little village belonging to Lord Bath.

The parents were too poor to give their son an education. Even the expense of the parish school exceeded their humble means. After eighteen months of incompetent instruction in a school whose full course of study comprised only reading and writing, the child at the age of eight was set at such manual tasks as his young hands could perform. His school life ended when that of more favored children had scarcely begun. When indigence compelled the lad to



leave his books and go to work, he had never been taught the multiplication table, or the simplest rules of grammar. This lack of early education was keenly felt throughout life. It was an embarrassment in society and public station. Though Mr. Ridgley's English was clear and expressive, it was often incorrect. The stern necessity of constant toil for a livelihood left no time for study. But the severe lessons of personal experience taught Mr. Ridgley the prime importance of an education, and doubtless led to those munificent endowments which at the close of his life he bestowed upon literary institutions.

In 1816, Stephen Ridgley came with his father to the United States. He was then a boy of ten. At this tender age, he was thrown entirely upon his own resources and compelled ever after to take care of himself.

He first served as an errand boy with William Lawrence, the cousin of Abbot Lawrence. For seven years he worked in Boston and the adjoining towns with no pay but his food and clothes. Numerous changes of place brought a variety of business experience. The house, the store, and the field were the shifting scenes of his youthful toil. In 1823, the lad for the first time received wages. He was then an errand boy for a Mrs. Paine in Boston. But his pay was only half a dollar a week. His next service was a little better rewarded. For six months' work on a farm in Dedham, his wages were twenty four dollars.

In the fall of 1824, young Ridgley went to sea. He shipped before the mast in the brig "Lapwing," under the command of Captain Blanchard. The object of the voyage

was fur trade with the Alaska Indians. At Archangel, the brig and cargo were sold to the Russian Government for seal skins. By the terms of the contract, possession was to be given at the Sandwich Islands. Accordingly, a Russian crew was taken on board and carried to the place of delivery. Thrown out of employment by this transaction, Ridgley sought another situation, and embarking on the ship "Parthian," under Capt. Rogers of Boston, sailed to Canton, the Sandwich Islands, and Alaska. His ship returned to Canton and then set out on the homeward voyage. On their way back, the sailors were subjected to great privations. Storms and head winds caused delays which threatened to exhaust their supplies of water and provisions. For ninety days, the crew were kept on short rations; but at last, though half-famished, they reached Boston in safety. The absence of the young sailor on all of these voyages lacked one month of three years.

In 1827, Ridgley again shipped as a sailor and went to Smyrna, Valparaiso, and Lima, and returned home by way of Liverpool. He was then employed on board the U. S. Revenue cutter "Hamilton," commanded by Lieutenant Girdley of Marblehead. He remained in this service about one year. The cutter was stationed at that time in Boston Harbor. While he was serving before the mast, Ridgley doubled the Cape of Good Hope once and Cape Horn three times.

At this period, Ridgley abandoned the life of a sailor and entered the lamp manufactory of William Carleton of Boston.

In 1836, Mr. Ridgley spent several months with an uncle in Warren County, Illinois. During his stay in the West, he visited St. Louis. It will be seen that this trip exerted an important influence upon his future career. After his western visit, he returned to Mr. Carleton's workshop. His pay, at first only seven dollars a week, was soon increased to one hundred dollars a month. Mr. Ridgley became the most expert workman in the shop. Heretofore, in consequence of the lowness of his wages, he was unable, even with the utmost economy, to save any of his earnings, but now a more liberal compensation allowed him to get a start which ultimately led on to fortune.

During this period, he joined the church of Dr. Nehemiah Adams, but subsequently, together with thirty-seven others, withdrew from this membership and formed the "Free Church," which was afterwards called Marlborough Chapel. The church lot, free of buildings, was bought for \$43,000; it is now worth hundreds of thousands.

After he had served his apprenticeship and thoroughly learned his trade, Mr. Ridgley resolved to go West and set up in business for himself. Accordingly, in 1838, he established himself in Alton, Illinois; but, in 1839, becoming convinced that St. Louis was destined to be a place of greater commercial importance, he removed to this city and opened a store for the sale of lamps and spirit gas. He brought to Alton a capital of \$3500, but through injudicious investments in land, the title of which proved defective, he lost \$2500, and consequently commenced his mercantile career in St. Louis with only \$1000 of available funds.

The name of the firm under which he began business in St. Louis was "Webb, Chapin, & Ridgley." Near the end of the first year, Mr. Ridgley bought out the interests of his associates and formed a partnership with Abner Stone of Lexington, Mass. After an existence of eight years, this firm was dissolved by the withdrawal of Mr. Stone, and then Mr. Ridgley conducted the business two years longer by himself. From the very outset, Mr. Ridgley was successful in business. In 1850, having meanwhile amassed a competency of \$50,000, he permanently retired from mercantile life. Prudent investments in real estate subsequently increased the moderate accumulations of trade to the proportions of an ample fortune. Mr. Ridgley's commercial success was based upon sterling integrity and the sound policy of giving his customers a fair equivalent for their money. It was his habit never to allow a lamp to be taken from his store without a personal examination to see if it was in good condition. He was enriched by the profits of a trade which his honest dealing secured. The custom of patrons who always found his wares to be exactly what he said they were enabled him in eleven years to withdraw from business with a competency for the rest of his life.

Mr. Ridgley was married in Alton, Illinois, April 20th 1840, to Susan Lucretia Hill of Northwood, N. H. This union was childless.

In the fall of 1866, Mr. Ridgley was elected State Senator for the term of four years. During the administrations of Governors Fletcher and McClurg, he was Chairman



of the Committee on Banks and Corporations. He was also Chairman of the Senatorial Delegation from St. Louis during his whole term of office. Though he never made speeches, he was an active, hard-working, and influential legislator. His reports on the various bills that came before his Committee were more numerous than those of any other Chairman. His remonstrances more than once deterred rural members from legislation unfavorable to the commercial interests of St. Louis.

In society Mr. Ridgley, though never brilliant, was always sensible. He never had the opportunity of opening the sealed treasures of learning, but he had traveled widely at home and abroad, and acquired practical wisdom by extended intercourse with mankind. He never attempted to discuss questions of literature and science, but his observations upon the commercial and political problems of the day were characterized by sound sense.

Mr. Ridgley was generous, but not indiscriminate, in his charities. His gifts were frequent, but they were bestowed with a secrecy which concealed them from the knowledge of the public. In early years, while still an apprentice earning but little more than his own livelihood, he solemnly resolved to devote one-tenth of his income to works of charity. The amount of the gifts bestowed in a life-long observance of his youthful resolve was large. His own need of early culture led him highly to appreciate the value of an education. Having no children of his own, he opened to the sons of others the avenues of learning. He sent one of his nephews to school for seven years. All of

the student's expenses, from the beginning of his preparatory training to the completion of his College course at Dartmouth, were defrayed by the hand of his benevolent uncle. The same hand supplied the means of fitting the son of an old friend for Harvard. It was Mr. Ridgley's intention to pay his way through the University, but the patriotic youth, responding to the summons of an imperiled country, fell upon the sanguinary field of Bull Run.

Mr. Ridgley was for fifty one years a member of the Presbyterian Church and a liberal supporter of the faith which he professed. A benevolence founded upon religious principles and successfully eluding public notice characterized his whole life.

On the 19th of January 1889, Mr. Ridgley transferred to Washington University properties worth \$66,000, to be used, when the accumulations have reached an adequate sum, for the erection of a fire-proof Library building. His friendliness to the University was still further evinced by a bequest of \$10,000.

For several years prior to his death, Mr. Ridgley had been acting as his own executor.\* In carrying out the provisions of his will, he had already disposed of the greater part of his property. Apart from generous legacies to kinsmen, the gifts which during his own life he had conferred upon charitable and literary institutions exceeded \$200,000. Such a noble devotion of private wealth to public beneficence is worthy of gratitude and imitation.

In his domestic relations, Mr. Ridgley was a kind and loving husband. His cheerful good nature brightened the

household like a ray of sunshine. In his wife's last sickness, protracted through four years of acute suffering, Mr. Ridgley did everything which the ministries of affection could do to relieve her anguish.

Mr. Ridgley's father was short, thick-set, and blue-eyed. The son inherited these physical traits. A florid complexion, mild blue eyes beaming with good nature, a short, stout, heavy figure suggestive of robust health and exuberant vitality were the bodily features which Mr. Ridgley derived from his English parentage.

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## SUSAN LUCRETIA RIDGLEY.



BORN APRIL 5TH, 1819;

DIED MARCH 1ST, 1879.



Mrs. Ridgley's maiden name was Susan Lucretia Hill. Her ancestors came from England. They were poor hard-working people whom a spirit of enterprise and a desire to better their humble lot brought to the New World. They transmitted to their descendants an ardent love of liberty. Both of the grandfathers of Mrs. Ridgley fought with patriotic valor in the battles of the American Revolution.

Mrs. Ridgley's parents were John Hill and Susan Pearl. Both were natives of New Hampshire, her father having been born in Northwood and her mother in Farmington. Not disheartened by poverty and humble birth, they aspired to education and social position. Fully availing themselves of their limited opportunities for instruction, they at length began, while still attending the winter schools, to teach during the summer months. After qualifying themselves under such unfavorable conditions for the duties of instruction, they followed for about ten years the profession of teaching. Various district schools in that part of the State were the scenes of their useful labors. In 1812, Mr. Hill abandoned teaching and moved to Middleton, N. H., where he opened a country store and inn. Miss Pearl was then teaching school in Middleton. Mr. Hill met her, and their



mutual attachment ripened into love and marriage. Their nuptials took place in 1812.

A few years later Mr. Hill sold his interest in the business to his partner by whose dishonesty he was defrauded of all the hard-earned savings of twelve years of toil. Discouraged by this reverse and by the difficulty of supporting his large family in Middleton, he moved to Saco, Me., and subsequently to Somersworth, N. H., where he luckily secured a good position in the employ of a manufacturing company. But he did not live long to enjoy the benefits of his better fortune. He died suddenly in 1831, leaving a widow and eight children, the oldest of whom was eighteen and the youngest five. The widow proved equal to the emergency. She was a woman of great energy of will and persistency of purpose. Her self-reliant struggles to support and educate her large family were successful. All of her children enjoyed the benefits of the village schools, and her second son, David Clarke Hill, partially completed a course of liberal studies at Dartmouth College. Having attained the distinction of second scholar in his class, he died at the age of twenty six, near the beginning of his Senior year.

The fourth child, Susan Lucretia Hill, was born in Middleton, N. H., April 5th 1819. Her youth was passed amid the privations of poverty and the austerities of religious zeal. In early life, her father had intended to consecrate his life to the Christian ministry, and ever afterwards, when failure befell his secular undertakings, he thought that every unsuccess was an evidence of divine displeasure for his

renunciation of a sacred duty. But he atoned for his abandonment of the clerical profession by the rigors of his domestic worship. The children were subjected to an austere discipline. Kept indoors on the Sabbath, forbidden to play, to sing lively airs, or to talk of worldly matters, they were compelled to sit still and commit to memory Watts' Hymns and passages of Scripture. But the natural feelings of childhood, rising in instinctive protest against this unreasonable severity, for a time thwarted the pious intentions of the father. Mrs. Ridgley has said that this excessive strictness, instead of strengthening her sense of its sanctity, rendered the Sabbath day odious, and it was not until the reflections of mature life corrected the impressions of girlhood, that she felt a genuine reverence for its holiness.

Susan was twelve years old at the death of her father. The family had been left in indigence. A filial desire to relieve the weight of their mother's burdens inspired the older children with a determination to earn their own livelihood. Susan accordingly left school and together with an older sister began dress-making at Great Falls, N. H. A few years afterwards, believing that a large city would afford ampler opportunities for success, they moved to Boston. By this time, Miss Hill had reached the years of womanhood. She was full of life and gaiety. But her fondness for the pleasures of society did not wholly divert her mind from serious thought. General reading occupied many of her leisure hours and religious meditations began to engage her mind. Her awakening interest in spiritual

affairs was shown by a more regular attendance at divine worship and by her taking charge of a class in the Sabbath School. Her religious sympathies attracted her to the Free Church. It was in Marlborough Chapel that she first met her future husband. This casual acquaintance strengthened into a tender and life-long attachment. In the spring of 1839, Miss Hill and one of her sisters came to Alton, Illinois. Her marriage with Mr. Ridgley took place in April of the following year. Her husband's prosperity soon enabled her to assume a social position which had been denied to her poverty. Upon the occasion of her first return to Boston, certain persons who in former years had treated the shop girl as beneath their notice now sought her society; but her just disdain quickly showed the keenness of her discrimination between a respect for personal worth and an obsequious regard for wealth. Mrs. Ridgley was a woman of ardent temperament, alike intense in her attachments and her aversions. She never affected a friendship which she did not feel. A smile of pretended welcome was never the mask of secret dislike. No duplicity ever disguised the expression of her real sentiments. Her natural ardor manifested itself in the enthusiastic activity of her life. Her zeal in social, political, and religious matters was unflagging. During the rebellion, her intense loyalty led her to unwearied labors for the sanitary comfort of our patriotic soldiers. Her firm belief in the natural rights of her sex impelled her to earnest efforts to remove the conventional restrictions which have excluded woman from so many honorable means of self-support. The families of her pas-

tors received many and substantial proofs of her kindness.

The initial steps which led to Mr. Ridgley's noble gifts to Washington University were taken by his wife. When it became obvious that her illness must terminate in death, Mrs. Ridgley made a will, in which, after disposing of her personal property, she adjured her husband to give an endowment to Washington University. A simple verbal request would doubtless have been sufficient, but she preferred to emphasize her desire by the solemnity of a formal testament.

Mr. Ridgley never for a moment hesitated to follow his wife's injunction. His own judgment fully sanctioned his wife's recommendation. A large share of the gratitude which Washington University owes for this munificence is due to Mrs. Ridgley.

The last sickness of Mrs. Ridgley was long and painful. She was confined to her chamber for more than four years, and after the first six months of her illness she was not able to lie down. A bed afforded her no relief; it only increased her anguish. For three years and a half she sat day and night in her chair. Her agony was at times almost beyond human endurance. But never, during all these weary months of distress, did Mrs. Ridgley utter a word of repining against the allotments of Providence. Her patience of suffering was more than heroic; it was Christian. Her uncomplaining and even cheerful fortitude was a signal proof of the efficacy of religious faith.



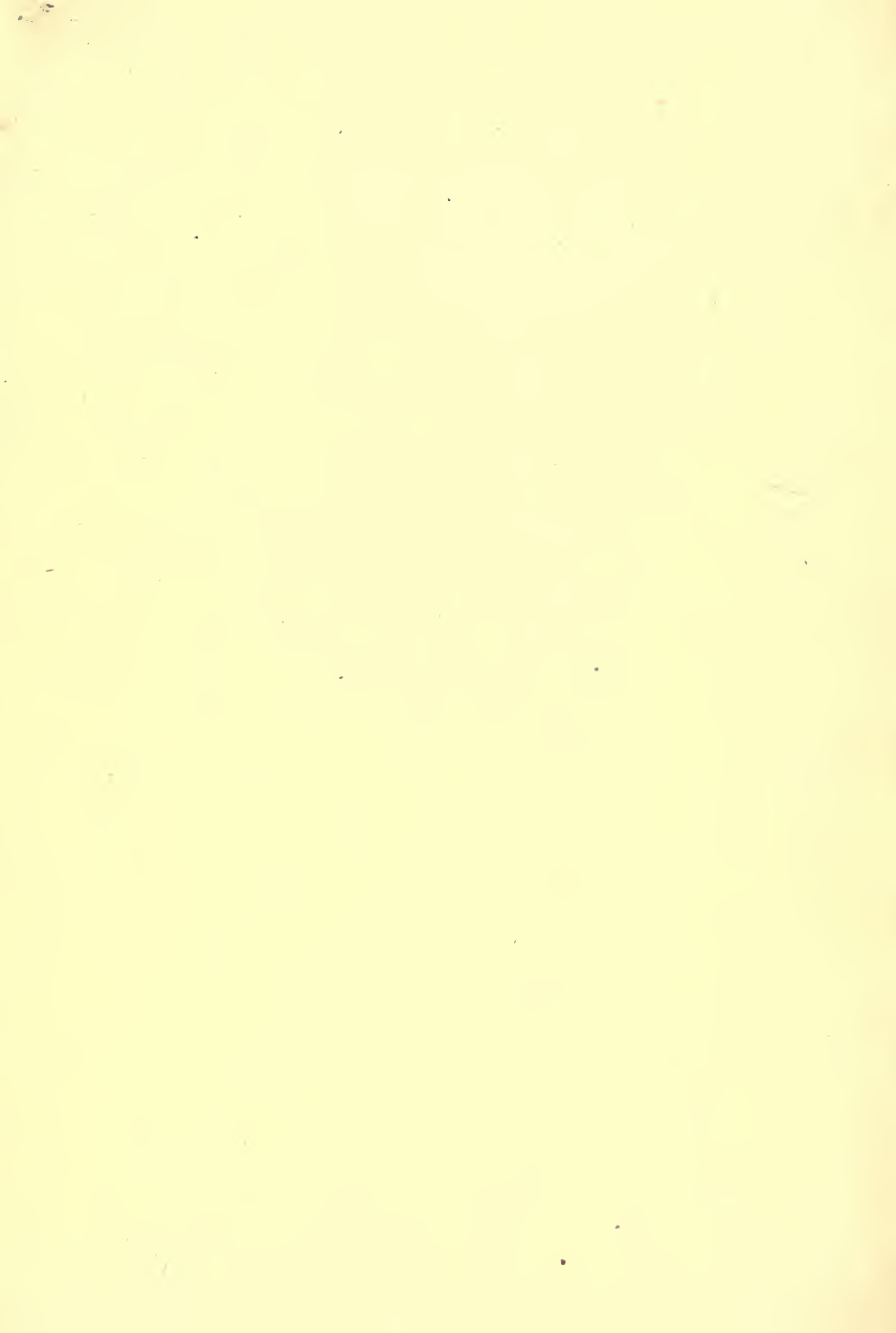












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